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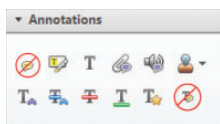
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# Journey Through Transformation: A Case Study of Two Literacy Learners

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## Abstract

The study draws on life history, literacy studies, and ethnographic approaches to exploring social practices as a frame to explore the narratives of two UK adult literacy learners who provide a description of the value or otherwise of their engagement with a transformative curriculum and pedagogical approach. Whilst one of the learners reveals his frustration at the lack of transformative opportunities in his learning programme, the other offers illustration of how transformative learning can be encouraged and how it can actually transform the life of its beneficiaries. In essence, both case studies highlight some requirements of transformative learning. Bourdieu's concepts of field, capitals, and habitus are applied; the critical elements of these concepts essentially being tools for consciousness raising and increasing the flow of capitals, including linguistic capital, which challenge the notion of spoilt identities based on neoliberal individual accountability that fails to address the structures and hierarchies of power.

## Keywords

adult learning, personal transformation, transformative education

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## Introduction

Literacy is not only a concern in the United Kingdom, it is also the focus of attention across the world (Hamilton, 2014). A dominant focus in the discourse on adult literacy in the United Kingdom in the last decade or so has been the issue of perceptions of literacy. Many studies, since the seminal intervention of Street (1984) and subsequent work by the New Literacy and other similar groups (Lank-shear, 1997; Pahl & Roswell, 2012; Stephens, 2000; Street, 1995), have drawn upon the divergent perceptions of literacy to provide what has been mostly a descriptive account of literacy and its forms (e.g., Street, 1984, 2003). Many other studies have drawn upon the same phenomenon to criticise policy and practice in the field of adult literacy (e.g., Tett, Hamilton, & Hillier, 2006). A basic consensus in these contributions is the recognition of a social as against a cognitive perception of literacy (Street, 1984, 1995; Tett et al., 2006). While the latter recognises literacy as something cognitive and which can be viewed as an independent variable, the former sees literacy as an element of social practice that reflects the social and historical local- edness of learners, teachers, and, indeed, the literacy content to be learned.

In recent times, however, some studies have begun to acknowledge the limitations of mere descriptive work in this area (Ade-Ojo, 2014; Collins & Blot, 2003; Street, 2003). A key emerging question in this respect is encapsulated in the question raised by Street (2006), “what next?” A common thread in this debate is that mere recognition of different perceptions and models of literacy confines such an engagement to the realm of theory. In essence, the practicality of the framework which recognises a social dimension to literacy is called to question. Illustrating this emergent apprehension, Collins and Blot (2003) argue that the engagement with the dominance of the autonomous model, particularly by the New Literacy Studies group, is somewhat flawed in that, although such understandings (as proposed by the proponents of the ideological/social model of literacy) have a more general intellectual value, ... “It is insufficient for re-thinking inherited values” (p. 7). In essence, what Collins and Blot (2003) fear is the limit to the influence that this perception has had on both policy and practice. This becomes even more important in the context of the Trinitarian relationship amongst the components of perceptions/ theory, policy, and practice as identified in Ade-Ojo and Duckworth (2014). They argue that there is a relationship which is anchored to a hierarchy of choices amongst these three components and that the choice of a particular perception at the higher level is most likely to attract the choice of particular policy and practice foci.

However, scholars in the field have not ignored this seeming paucity of applicability in the context of a social perception of literacy. For example, Street, in what might be considered a more pragmatic engagement with the issue (1995, 2006, 2011), focuses on how the dominance of the autonomous model is entrenched through education and notes (1995) that this state of dominance does “force us to question whether the current framework in which such activities are conducted is the most fruitful” (p. 24). He, therefore, argues that the dominance of the autonomous

model is due mainly to two reasons: pedagogization of literacy which has been achieved through the institutionalisation of the dominant model in the process of teaching and learning and the conflation of literacy practices with “schooling or pedagogy” (p. 111).

Taking this theme further, Ade-Ojo (2014) suggests that one of the actions required in order for enabling the social perception of literacy to keep pace with practice and policy of similar inclinations is the recurricularization of literacy through the concept of literacy for specific purposes. In his view, this process will enhance the development of a more functional model of social literacy. The overarching argument here is that if literacy is to empower the learners through its recognition of their historical and social contexts, if we are to move away from the age-long banking model of literacy curriculum first identified by Freire (1972), we must ensure that both the literacy curriculum and its attendant pedagogy we offer our learners are transformative (Duckworth, 2013, 2014). Such a transformative curriculum is of course not promoted by a literacy education in which teaching has been “harnessed to an explicitly instrumentalist policy agenda” (Garbett, Orrock, & Smith, 2013, p. 239), thereby eliminating any prospect of transformative learning.

From the understanding of the current landscape in respect of adult literacy, its curriculum development, and pedagogy of delivery, this study has two distinct aims: First, it sets out to provide an illustration of a “recurricularized” and “repedagogized” literacy curriculum in the further education (FE) setting in the United Kingdom and, second, to evaluate the impact of such a transformative curriculum on the progress and achievement of two learners. It draws on critical, pedagogical, and sociological paradigms such as Bourdieu’s cultural capital (Sullivan, 2002), Mezirow’s (1997) transformative paradigms, and Freire’s Praxis in education (1972) to analyse and discuss relationships and processes. In doing this, the article uses a case study approach as a background to the narratives of two adult literacy learners who provide a description of the value or otherwise of their engagement with such a curriculum and pedagogical approach. While one of the learners reveals his frustration at the lack of transformative opportunities in his learning programme, the other offers illustration of how transformative learning can be encouraged and how it can actually transform the life of its beneficiaries. In essence, both case studies highlight some requirements of transformative learning. The first demonstrates how the lack of transformation can be pervasive in our dominant curricula, thus forcing learners to seek their transformation through other avenues, while the second provides evidence of how a transformative setting/curriculum can ultimately help learners to achieve at the highest level. With these case studies as illustrations, the article offers some guidance on the delivery of transformational literacy to adults.

## **Research Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks**

Drawing from an overarching qualitative framework (Creswell, 2003; Flick, 2014; O’leary, 2014), the research approach is based on a range of strategies that include

participatory action research (PAR) and a range of theoretical positions such as the feminist standpoint theory. It also draws on life history, literacy studies, and ethnographic approaches to exploring social practices. This is a reflection of one of the underpinning values held by the authors which recognises the multiplicity of literacy event sites and the social dimension of literacy practices. In essence, there is an element of convergence (Ade-Ojo, 2011) between the research outlook and the ideological leaning of the researchers in the area of literacy.

The study was politically driven, and this informed the choice of PAR as the central research method. PAR has emerged in recent years as an approach that strives to be liberating and not controlling (Habermas, 1974) for social transformation, and “consciousness raising” (Freire, 1996) among the underprivileged and minorities, in a setting where an ever-growing underclass is accepted as the norm (Clarke, 2002) with an emergent label of stigma given by society and amplified by the media (Beresford, 2002). This approach was particularly important as the research participants identify themselves as “underclass,” “stigmatised,” “left behind,” and “caught in a stinking trap of despair.” PAR with its “alignment to social action and enlightenment” (Habermas, 1974, p. 113) emancipation (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998), adult education intervention, development, and change within communities and groups (Carr & Kemmis 1986; Duckworth, 2013; Kemmis, 2001), therefore, fitted the purpose.

Consequently, the drive to address the above elicited the desire to provide the environment and tools to facilitate learners’ celebration of their own ways of knowing, rather than to remain rooted in the previously dominant models and their perception of what is considered legitimate knowledge. One immediate impact of this, and which reinforces the notion of convergence referred to earlier, is the recognition of the vernacular literacies and other embodied knowledge that learners (and the teacher) bring into the classroom. In engaging with collaborative research in this study, the researchers hoped that they may be able to help participants acquire the critical tools to transform their own lives in line with the principles embedded in Praxis (Freire, 1972).

PAR, as used in this study, builds on Freire’s critical pedagogy (1972) as a response to the traditional formal models of education where the teacher takes the power and imparts information to the students that are perceived as passive empty vessels waiting to be filled. This is a model that ultimately fails to recognise the powerful knowledge learners bring into the classroom with them, such as socially situated knowledge (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). In this vein, the main goal of PAR is for both researcher/practitioner and participants to work within an egalitarian framework that facilitates an effective dialogue and critical consciousness and, in the case of this study, through a critical curriculum. To reflect the democratic and participatory nature of PAR, therefore, it is very important that the participants (learners) are involved in the research (and curriculum design) process.

In its analysis, this study draws on Bourdieu’s theory “The Forms of Capital” (1986) as a framework, providing the sensitising tools for understanding how

learners' narrative accounts of their educational and personal journey from childhood to adult literacy learner and beyond have been shaped in the public and private domain of their life. Bourdieu explains the production of inequality within society by the forms of capital: economic capital, social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is vital in exposing the transmission of wealth and power and incorporating ideas about how those in a position of power, who Puwar (2004) describes as "insiders," reproduce and maintain their domination. In unfolding the learners' narratives, the overarching aim was to recognise and understand their narratives against the backdrop of wider socio/economic/political and historical contexts (Goodson, 1992; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). The element of critical education that is recognised in this study offers the opportunity to extend on Bourdieu's concept by including this as a lever for change and the potential for learner empowerment and transformation (Duckworth, 2013), which exposes and challenges power structures that exist in our culture that, if left unexamined, continue to reinforce the status quo about who has power (Duenkel, Pratt, & Sullivan, 2014).

### **Case Study I: Craig's Story**

Aged 16, having gained no qualifications at school, Craig had begun to work his way up from shop floor work which demanded heavy lifting of warehouse goods and general manual work. Drawing from Bourdieu's form of capitals, it could be argued that Craig was using his "muscle capital" that stands in contradistinction to other possible capitals that could be employed in the same workplace. However, he progressed to management in his 30s, and the use of muscle capital was swapped for what in effect might be classified as "cultural/linguistic" capital. In this context, a lot depended on how well he could "talk the talk," thereby meeting the expectations of both his employers and the staff he managed. In a way, that employment provided him with an opportunity for transformation, and this manifested in his life as he married, raised a family, and purchased a detached house in a residential area. This was a significant transformation from his childhood home when he had lived in what he described as a "poor housing estate, with little opportunities for 'owt but crime.'"

However, his position in the field of work changed; with the increasing focus on the use of computers in the workplace, Craig was made redundant for what he called "finding out I was no good at writing." Prior to this, Craig had enlisted his wife's expertise in writing, highlighting the often-unheralded use of women's hidden labor. With the advent of the information and communicative technology in the offices, memos and reports were expected to be produced on the computer at a faster pace, often on the same day. As a result, Craig did not have the opportunity to take them home for his wife to check.

Although essentially in the context of work, a first emergent lesson here was the lack of support and an entrenched expectation. Presumably, Craig's role was to manage men, and for this, he must have been adequately equipped in terms of the

vocabulary and the knowledge of procedures. However, the dominance of the view that oracy does not have any role in literacy (Street, 1984) consigned him to the dustbin of history. On returning to college, therefore, a transformative curriculum must recognise Craig's need for a social support network as well as the recognition of the literacy-related skills he already possesses. It is only with this form of recognition that any form of transformation could begin to emerge. A transformative curriculum, therefore, must recognise learners' need for a support network for self-fulfilment and must acknowledge the residual literacy-related skills they have already developed.

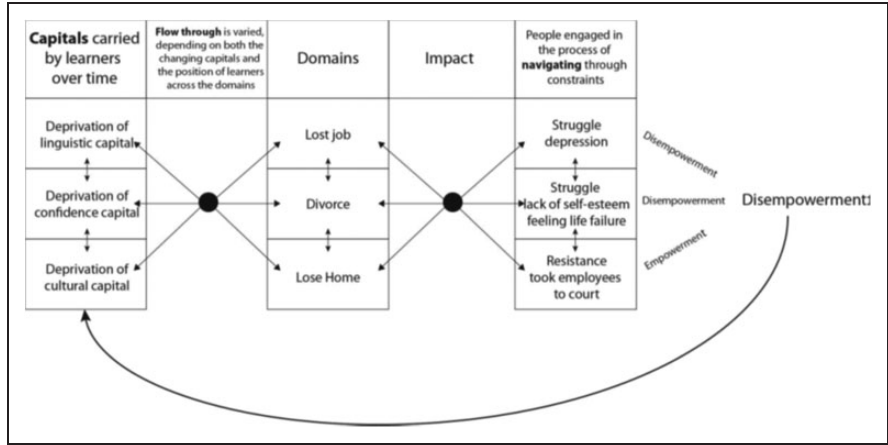
Craig highlights the impact that a nontransformative stance such as the one entrenched in his former workplace might have noting,

It's not just that I struggled to write the reports and to spell, using the computers was also new to me. I panicked half the time. Even when I got to grips with typing I couldn't tell if the spell check was checking the right words cos my spelling was up the shoot. I'd try to put it off so I could take whatever writing I needed to do home for me missus to check, but it got so the boss wanted it within the day. That's when I was caught out. They'd come and collar me telling me that I was being lazy, not trying. It was as though they thought I was just throwing the stuff I sent them together, Course I wasn't ... Sometimes it'd take hours. Their attitude towards me changed. It felt like I was back at school, you know being judged. That's when I was given the push, made redundant. I know it's because they caught me, yer might get away with not being able to write properly on the shop floor but as manager I was supposed to get it right. Told them I'd go to night school, they didn't care really, they'd made their mind up what could I do.

A second issue emerging from Craig's history as reflected in the quote above was the issue of "judgement." From Craig's account, he felt that he was under siege and being judged. This naturally becomes a burden that he is likely to take with him to college. The crucial issue here is whether he would again be confronted at college with a judgemental atmosphere where he would feel under siege or whether the attitude of his college tutor was going to be nonjudgemental and recognise the fact that he was looking for a second chance. As indicated by Craig, he offered to go to night school but was refused that opportunity. A crucial lesson for a would-be transformative curriculum/teaching, therefore, has to recognise that learners such as Craig come with the sentiment of being judged. As such, for a literacy curriculum to offer the chance of transformation, it must avoid being judgemental. This can only be initiated if such a transformative learning recognises previous negatives and help learners to navigate around them. This constitutes a form of psychophysical process, which not only psychologically provides succour for the learner but also provides a nonoppressive physical space for the learning to occur. Such a space might draw on a range of features familiar to the learner in order for transformation to thrive.

A further lesson emerging from Craig's narrative is the need to recognise the fact that many learners hide some of the more debilitating conditions which impinge on





**Figure 1.** Cycle of deprivation of linguistic/cultural capital, confidence and struggle, and resistance (Duckworth, 2013).

their ability to learn. Within a nontransformative learning setting, such conditions are hidden away because of learners’ fear of the expected response to their condition. In contrast, a transformative learning setting actively and empathetically encourages learners to disclose such conditions while promoting an understanding that the conditions merely make them different and are not to be hidden away. Craig’s narrative as continued below further buttresses this point.

Craig describes how he had kept his dyslexia a secret from his work colleagues and managers at work because he did not want to be stigmatised. He struggled with his condition but conformed to the ideals of what he thought was expected of him by utilising his wife’s literacy skills and masking them as his own to his employers. He experienced feelings of embarrassment, great anxiety, and stress at hiding his struggles with literacy. Unable to meet the traditional ideals of manhood, which include being literate and being able to transfer “literacy capital” into the world of work, he was subjected to what might be seen as symbolic violence (Duckworth, 2013). When made unemployed through redundancy, this was strengthened by the construction of his unemployment being positioned as an individual deficit.

Taking this to an environment where transformative learning thrives, therefore, it is clear that transformative learning must help learners to build capitals and address the capital deficit they bring with them. Craig did not have the linguistic capital needed for the field he was working in. His habitus was revealed as lacking (Bourdieu, 1984), and he was subjected to symbolic violence by his employees. Subsequently, he went on to lose his job, wage, house, marriage, and economic power. Figure 1 illustrates how the deprivation of capitals across the domains of Craig’s life led to both struggle and challenge. He struggled with depression and a lack of self-esteem but challenged his employers. The challenge for a transformative learning

curriculum/environment is how to facilitate the “carryover” of nondominant capital which many learners possess.

Craig tried to fight unfair dismissal through the courts. However, he lost the case and ended up in debt. This resulted in further struggles and disempowerment for Craig.

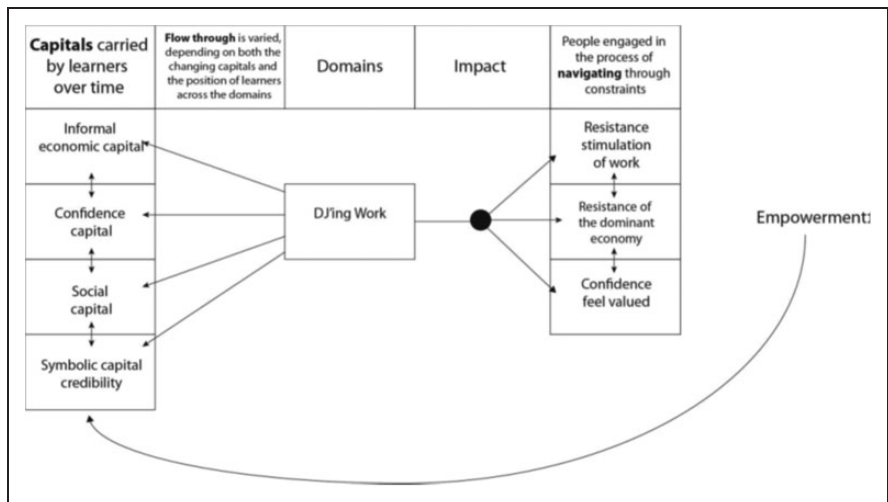
## **Craig’s Account: The Journey Towards Transformation**

Craig joined a college programme which seemed to be pushing compliance with the classes very much in line with a clocking in and clocking out system. The programme, the New Deal, was a programme of study designed and located mostly in FE colleges in the 2000s to which unemployed people were often “conscripted.” For many of these learners, a basic skills programme was often the only choice available. Even though they were adults, many with a high number of years of work experience were treated with a lack of trust with constant supervision to ensure they “toed the line.” Registers were taken at regular intervals (these registers were audited by management) with the threat that lateness or failure to attend will result in their social security benefits being stopped. It was, therefore, not so surprising that although Craig was keen to learn, he did not complete the programme.

One key issue emerging from Craig’s termination of his study was the dissonance between his experience and goals, on the one hand, and the programme of study he was offered, on the other. On this programme of study, Craig was offered a discrete form of literacy which had no synergy with his ultimate goal of returning to management and which simply offered him instruction on the structure of language. All of these had no meaning for him and echo what the breakdown between the “object and subject of literacy learning” highlighted in Ade-Ojo (2014). It is probable that it was because the programme offered Craig was not tailored towards helping him develop the skills he needed to reenter the field of management that he had so little interest in it. As noted by Craig,

I can look at my English and get that right I’ll be able to pick up a job similar as I lost. I can do the rest of the job with my eyes closed, it’s just the writing I’m dire at.

A transformative learning experience, therefore, must take into account adult learners’ ultimate goals and must recognise that they do not come to school as a “*tabula rasa*.” As such, transformative learning must offer a curriculum that focuses on the specific needs of specific learners. In Craig’s case, instead of tailoring the course to Craig’s needs, it was a generic programme where there was a focus on processing the learners into the local supermarket to do unskilled work. These were the practice applications that they had to complete no matter what their trajectory, hopes, or aspirations. The job centre also worked with the college to ensure that they were all pushing the learners in the same direction. Craig described how:



**Figure 2.** Cycle of resistance and empowerment in the informal economy (Duckworth, 2013).

The job centre keeps telling me to apply for work in Asda’s warehouse. Then when I go to see the New Deal adviser in college they shove job applications under me nose for dead end jobs. It’s as though all them years I put into working myself up to manager don’t count for a thing’t.

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Another learning point emerging from Craig’s story is that transformative learning must acknowledge and accept other sources of empowerment for learners. (Non-curricular activities can empower for curriculum development.) As we shall see later, Craig found that he could empower himself and earn money on the informal economy by working as a disc jockey (DJ). Music is something that he was always interested in, a capital he could trade in to earn money. The interview excerpt with Craig as indicated below reinforces this point:

Resp.: With music and DJ’ing I can be my own boss. It gave me something back.  
Int.: What back?  
Resp.: Don’t know suppose I’m doing something I enjoy and want to do, it’s not like the New Deal course.

In fact, it can be argued that DJ’ing allowed Craig to take agency of his life. He was doing something he enjoyed and something he felt he was good at. This helped him to gain his confidence and earn money. Craig continued to work as a DJ on quitting the New Deal Programme. Figure 2 illustrates how Craig took agency by challenging the dominant economy and expectations to take an unskilled and

unstimulating job and found confidence and feelings of being valued by pulling on his everyday practices and working as a DJ in an informal economy.

## **Joanne's Story: The Starting Point**

Joanne left school at 15 to work in a factory as a sewing machinist. Soon after the birth of her first child at 17, Joanne returned to work as a sewing machinist. Below she describes the work:

Resp.: Machining is all about piece work, the more you do the more you get paid.

Int.: Does that put pressure on you?

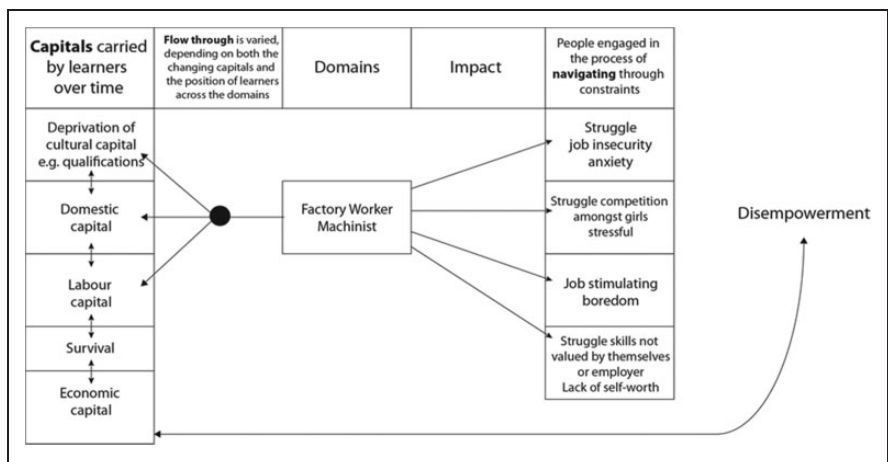
Resp.: I suppose so, but you know you'll get a decent enough wage so it's worth it.

However, this type of work also leaves insecurity and anxiety related to the prospect of being laid off or/and becoming ill. Joanne describes the insecurity of this work:

Resp.: You can make good money machining it's piece work. You'd push out as many as yer could and know it'd be going in yer wage. But it was hard work. If yer were ill or owt yer were paid nowt. And if the business went slack you'd be laid off. It paid off when the orders were coming in but when they weren't you'd had it and had to go spongin' for a borrow to pay the rent.

Joanne's wage and economic security were directly linked to the prosperity of the business. She worked under these precarious conditions with the threat of being laid off hanging over her with the prospect of having to sponge off someone if a wage did not materialise. She took this for granted and worked hard to keep her job. Competition was also set amongst the girls in order to get the maximum output (sewing). The competition echoes the concept of neoliberalism (Ball, 2008) with each worker competing to keep their own job. Survival was based on understanding the rules of the game and aiming to win. With a child to care for and bills to pay, not participating in the competition was not an option. Removal from the field would have led to further poverty. Figure 3 demonstrates the cycle of labour power and competition for Joanne and how she struggled as she navigated across the constraints.

Following further issues in her personal life, Joanne was forced to leave her abusive partner and became the main and sole carer for her three children. She was forced to leave the factory and to return to college. For Joanne, college was the mediating site for her transition from working as a sewing machinist to nursing. This was a transformation that seemed improbable for Joanne at the beginning. She describes how she viewed the student nurses before she had a chance to become one of them:



**Figure 3.** Cycle of labour power and competition for Joanne (Duckworth, 2013).

Resp.: They all seem cleverer than me somehow. Sometimes I wonder if it's worth putting myself through the stress.

Int.: What keeps you going?

Resp.: I suppose it's having you and the other in the research group to talk to. It's daft I know having this self-doubt but sometimes I can't help it. I can't believe I actually got here sometimes I just get a nagging that I'll lose it.

For Joanne, in addition to the anxiety that she would lose everything (her opportunity to train to become a nurse), there was the feeling that she did not fit in. The interview excerpt below encapsulates Joanne's perception of the self at the commencement of her study at college.

Resp.: I felt like a fraud on the ward, like someone like me shouldn't be there.

Int.: Why?

Resp.: Always thought nurses and doctors were different than me somehow, smarter so I feel like a bit of a fraud.

Int.: Fraud. Why?

Resp.: Like they'll find out about where I've come from and tell me I'm not good enough.

The above demonstrated the difficulty of moving from the field of casual piece of work to a professional job. This in essence captures the entirety of a journey in transformative learning. The notion of reinvention and individualisation (Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsscheim, 2001; Giddens, 1991) highlights how sometimes learning programmes totally ignore the impact of the lack of capitals in the field and

their impact on how the learner engages with the field. Indeed what is striking in the elaboration of Joanne's experience below is the importance of social capital in challenging the hidden element of symbolic violence (Duckworth, 2013) where Joanne felt her habitus was not right and incongruent to the field of health. Without the necessary support, the constraints she had could clearly have determined the chance of success in a new field.

In the conditions of training to be a nurse in the university and the effort needed on a personal level to reside in a habitus where Joanne felt she was legitimately belong to and capable of developing the metalanguage of nursing, there was the possibility of her experiencing what Bourdieu (1991) described as symbolic violence. Indeed, entering the nursing profession had moved the goal posts, in both the "elaborated code" that people in the new field she had moved into (Higher Education and nursing) used and the acquisition of the metalanguage of medicine. Reay (2004) makes a relevant point in this context by drawing on Bourdieu's argument that "the operation on the habitus regularly excludes certain practices, which are unfamiliar to the cultural groupings to which the individual belongs" (p. 433). Although many practices Joanne encountered were out of her cosmology, language was one that manifested itself on a moment-to-moment, day-to-day basis. The obstacle of encountering and incorporating new language acquisition into her daily practice proved to be huge for Joanne. She described how new words "flew at her from all directions" and how "I couldn't even say 'em let alone spell 'em." Joanne was clearly in need of what Bourdieu (1986) describes as social capital.

For Joanne, in her drive to develop the relevant literacy/language skills as highlighted above, however, the first element of transformative learning came in the form of support to help her develop a network of support. This came in the form of one of her tutors and a senior practice nurse who met up with Joanne at the local beauty spot. A significant achievement at this "meet-up" was that supported her to "walk through the reserve" and to chat about the worries and concerns Joanne was experiencing. Unlike the case with Craig, here was a conscious recognition of the fact that the learner could potentially come with a hidden burden and that the first step in transformation is to help the learner recognise that these burdens are surmountable. Further support continued with telephone conversations with the practice nurse who extended a hand of friendship to Joanne. Joanne revealed how she felt supported in expressing difficulties and learning from someone who had a grasp of the metalanguage as an "insider" and someone who could offer advice about working on a ward. This line of support continued through Joanne's tutor who had also been a nurse. Joanne's acquisition of language was focused on her ultimate destination/goal—nursing. In order to further the achievement of transformation on the language front, a context-specific vocabulary development approach, which focused on a number of key words used on the ward, was initiated. Words that regularly occur in practice were particularly focused on. For example, the combination of "hypo"—low with "hyper"—high to form hypotension that means low blood pressure and hypertension that means high blood pressure was used to illustrate

word formation processes. Joanne considered this approach and the support mechanism that came with it as been extremely beneficial. In addition, study aids of personal dictionaries were introduced and demonstrated to develop Joanne's skills and, most importantly, her confidence.

The essence of the teacher's role in this context was mostly to help Joanne to develop and put in place strategies to develop her skills. This was an ongoing process. Drawing from this, therefore, it becomes obvious that a consciously transformative learning experience must not only draw from a range of support networks but must be ongoing and must respond to the learner's needs as they emerge. In Joanne's case, that ongoing structure evolved between her teacher and others who were not necessarily responsible for her learning in the strict sense. The key here is that her tutors recognised that transformation for Joanne will benefit from collaboration with others in a range of areas and responded by securing the required collaboration. Transformative learning, therefore, is and must remain a collaborative endeavour.

Joanne found the support from the group, which included her teacher who is herself a former nurse and, therefore, had links with other nurses, a way of developing social cultural capital. Joanne described how being part of the group was supportive. She highlighted how:

I really don't think I could have carried on with my nurse training if I hadn't been part of the research group. I knew that if I had something I was stuck on or that was worrying me I only needed to pick up a phone. Many a time I felt like packin' it in cos I felt like I just wasn't good enough. It was having someone who believed in me that made the difference.

Drawing on the bonds made at college and subsequently at the new university, Joanne began to feel more confident in the field. Ultimately for Joanne, the social capital converted into cultural capital (qualified nurse status), and the cultural capital was converted to economic capital when Joanne received her first pay packet.

What is clear from this case study is that transformation is not necessarily classroom based and is not essentially built around a specific curriculum. Issues arising from Joanne's story echo arguments for a different way of pedagogising learning for adults. For example, developing a context-based vocabulary activity and a nursing metalanguage focus echoes the argument of Ade-Ojo (2014) in which he calls for a literacy for specific purposes. It can be argued that the specific nature of the literacy offered Joanne is essentially a driver of transformation in the sense of developing both her social and linguistic capitals.

Joanne's journey in transformation and her ultimate (in a relative sense) destination are captured in Figure 4 which illustrates the cycle of transitional empowerment, whereby Joanne moved from disempowerment in the field of factory work to accruing capitals and empowerment in the profession of nursing. Although she initially struggled to believe she would fit into the field of health, over time, she felt a sense of belonging and being valued.

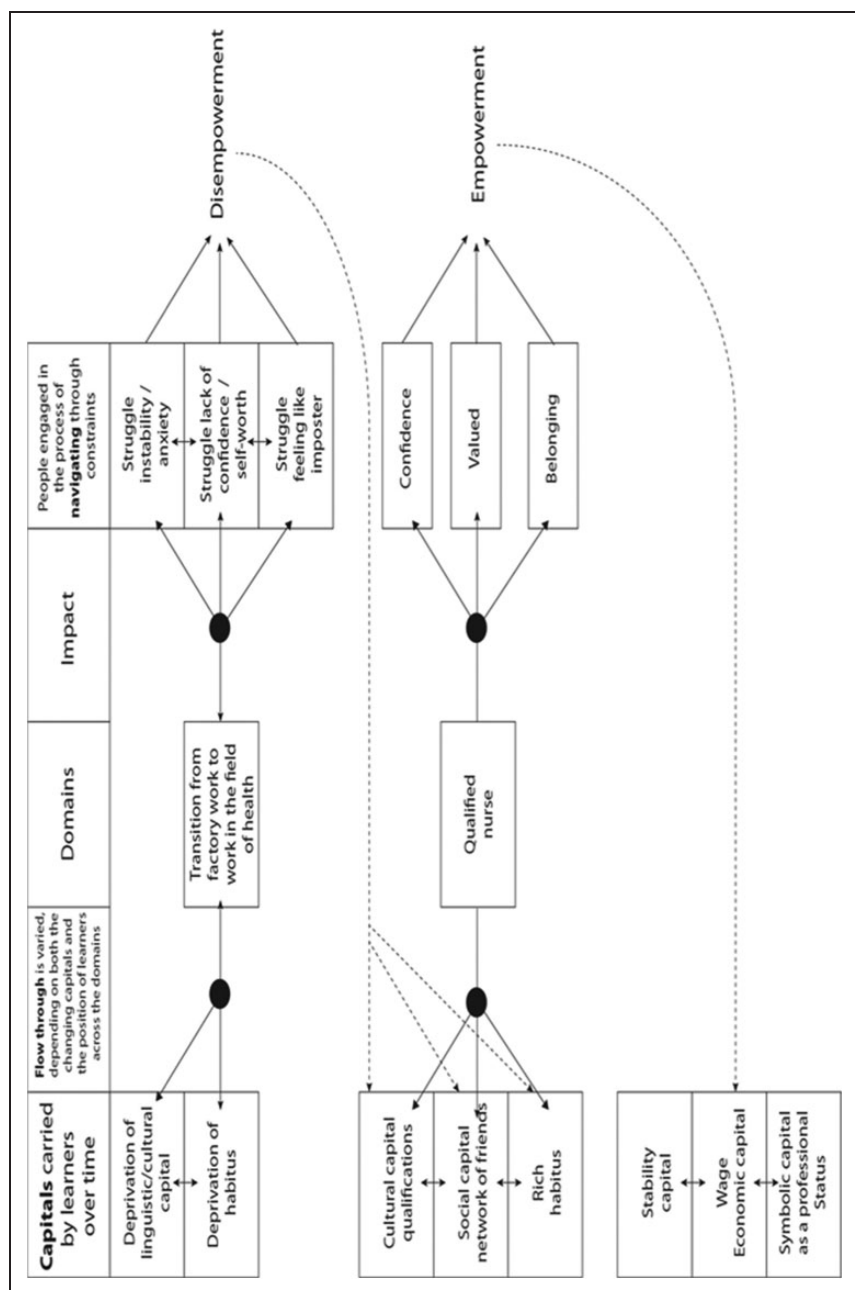


Figure 4. Cycle of transitional empowerment (Duckworth, 2013).



However, this movement across fields was not without emotional costs. Joanne reports how she hadn't been able to help her eldest son when he was at school "cos I didn't know how to do the things like spelling myself" and "couldn't see a future out of the estate like I can now, I thought it was the right way to wag it an' that." The estate with its own rules, its own field, fed into a habitus in which "respect was given to those who put their two fingers up at education." With her youngest child, Tracy did not feel that it was important to help her son with his homework:

I feel a bit guilty now, but with our L it was different than my two youngest. I never bothered helping him. It's not that I didn't think it was important, I didn't even think about it. I just wanted him to leave school and get a job like I did.

As Joanne accrued cultural capital at college (qualifications), her position in the field changed her view of what motherhood entails and the cultural support a child needs. Joanne's habitus on being a mother now fits into the dominant middle-class gaze.

Resp.: It's my job to make sure our B and L do their homework. I sit with them and go through it. I'm really strict.

Int.: Why do you think it's important to help them with their homework?

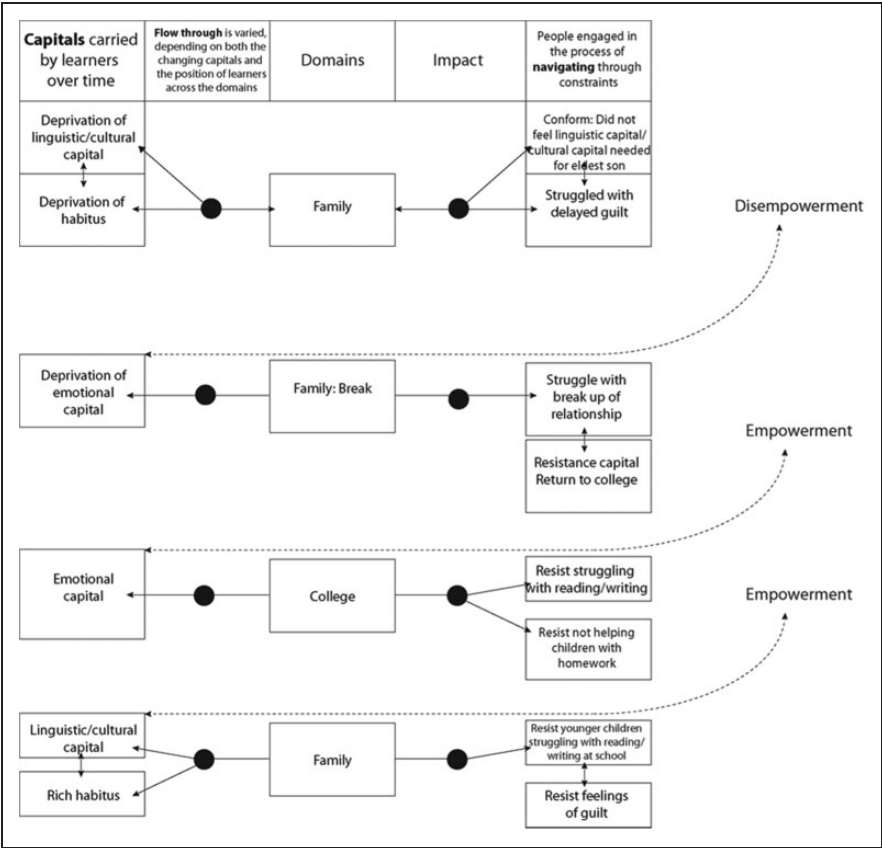
Resp.: So they don't end up at my age with a load of wasted years behind them. No, I'd like them to get a decent job and do something with their life.

Joanne's behaviour and notion of motherhood have changed as her habitus has been shaped by the field of education (college and university) and job (nursing). This has resulted in higher expectation of the job her youngest children progress to.

Figure 5 illustrates the cycle of linguistic deprivation and disempowerment across the domain of family. It also demonstrates how resistance capital (this time after the breakup of a relationship) can be a trigger to commencing college and gaining linguistic and cultural capital as well as empowerment.

## Further Discussion and Conclusions

The various fields that had impact on the transformations or lack of it for the two case studies reviewed in this article were not static, and in the world of work, there was the need to adapt one's habitus in order to have a congruous relationship with it. For example, when computers were brought into the organisation, Craig was unable to shape his linguistic and technological capital to meet the needs of the field and was subjected to symbolic violence. Also the fields were a challenge when people newly entered them with a habitus that was deemed lacking in the correct capitals. The gap between the habitus and the needs of the fields created a space for reflection. This reflection led Joanne to try to plug and develop her linguistic capital, so she felt more confident and comfortable in the field of health. Being critically reflexive can have a negative and positive outcome. For Joanne, although she initially struggled,



**Figure 5.** Cycle of linguistic deprivation, disempowerment, resistance, and supporting children to gain linguistic capital (Duckworth, 2013).

she shaped her habitus to meet the needs of the field and gained the confidence to feel a part of it and to develop a sense of belonging. Craig, on the other hand, began to view himself against an idealised view of employee, who could read and write without support and easily embrace new technology. Not having the dominant cultural capital positioned him as being deficit. Interestingly, the muscle capital was pulled upon for empowerment, even when it had been replaced for a period of time by cultural capital aspirations, as illustrated by Craig’s trajectory from manual work to management.

Both Craig and Joanne were subjected to symbolic violence, but Joanne managed to take agency inside the field, whilst Craig took agency outside the field, in leaving the New Deal programme and entering the informal economy to secure a job he enjoyed and where he could also earn money. Let us consider Joanne’s perceived

lack of linguistic capital and how this positioned her in the field of nursing. The habitus had a durability that even the acquisitions of capitals could not make congruent within the field of nursing. The learners' narratives offered an insight into their habitus that reflected what was seen as well as what was unseen. It is these narratives which allowed a deep awareness of the impact of past experiences of symbolic violence and trauma on the learners' changing positions across the domains they travelled. Bourdieu's conceptualisation of habitus and symbolic violence has further helped to explore the learners' awareness and understanding of the fields they inhabit and highlight what shapes their behaviour and movements in those fields. It offers an insight into the restraining and conforming factors they faced, together with exposing critical spaces for resistance and "empowerment in terms and actions" (Brookfield, 2003, p. 143).

## Conclusions

Developing from the narratives built by and around these case studies, two learning points in transformative learning become clear. First, the learner is central to the process of transformation. As illustrated by both Joanne and Craig, both learners had to take agency of their learning process before transformation could occur. In the case of the former, taking control occurred inside the field, while for the latter, it occurred outside the field. The challenge for teachers and policy makers is, therefore, how to empower the learner to take agency within the field. Joanne's narrative offers illustrations of ways in which this might be done.

Second, the infrastructure for transformation is not necessarily built around the curriculum. While it is true that every learning enterprise must have a curriculum affiliated to the goal of the learner, achieving the objectives of the curriculum can be effected through recourse to factors external to the curriculum. As illustrated by Joanne's case, attitudes, environment, and empathy could be instrumental in facilitating transformation in learning and, though essentially external, could become the trigger for the achievement of the curriculum element. As a result, the real transformation might well be what is achieved at this level, which might ultimately lead to the mastery of the curriculum elements.

All of the above become relevant in the context of critical approaches to literacy/education including the arguments of the New Literacy Studies group and Freire's Praxis. In reality, the critical elements of these concepts essentially tool for consciousness raising and increasing the flow of capitals including linguistic capital which challenges the notion of spoilt identities based on neoliberal individual accountability (where many learners have been labelled as failures in their educational careers) and offers a space to recognise the structural inequalities in the learners lives—which include class, gender, and ethnicity. It is in recurricularizing and repedagogizing literacy curricula in such a way that they provide literacy learners the space to consciously reassess their own capitals and to map out the capitals required in the habitus that their goals relate to that the first steps in transformative

learning begins. The flow or lack of flow of capitals in the fields the learners inhabit shapes their experiences in various aspects including social, linguistic, confidence, and so on. Most importantly, the flow of capital, which might mean gaining new capital and shedding old ones, should ultimately lead to a rupture in the habitus and, therefore, creating the space for transformation in contradistinction to a norm-imposed deterministic habitus. How best to achieve this rupture is the essence of transformative practice in literacy teaching.

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## Author Biographies

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